

# The Builder.

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**H**EN the Common Council of the City of London decided, a few weeks ago, on appropriating 20,000*l.* a year for twenty years, out of the coal duties, for improvements in the various thoroughfares of the city, and other public works, the best mode of applying this sum was discussed out of doors. One party urged that the total amount should at once be made available, and improvement be effected on a grand scale; and the other, that so far from absorbing the sum obtainable by the mortgage of this 20,000*l.* a year, in some immense achievement, steps should be taken to prevent the committee from spending more than the year's income in any one twelvemonth. "Everybody," said the *Morning Herald*, taking the latter view of the question, "can understand the difference between splendour and comfort. We are not saying that the metropolis of England should not aim at magnificence; but we do say, that if every thing that can be raised is to be spent in the main thoroughfares, so as not to leave an available shilling for the clearing away of a noisome alley, or the widening of an impassable lane, the result will be—that which we all lament without being able to cure—that magnificence and misery, luxury and squalid wretchedness, will be for ever found dwelling in the nearest neighbourhood."

"It need not be feared that in this way improvement would proceed at a tardy pace. A sum of 20,000*l.*, in minor improvements, would do a great deal. One year's income would probably complete the improvement lately commenced in Fetter-lane. A second would break through from the site of the Fleet-prison into the Old Bailey. A third might open a road from Farringdon-street into Fetter-lane; and a fourth would carry that road on into Chancery-lane."

The writer then asks the members of the corporation to look round their own neighbourhoods, and see whether each ward in the city did not require some minor, but important, improvement, which a grant of 10,000*l.* or 20,000*l.* would easily effect. "And if they feel this to be the case, let them determine not to lavish the whole capital away (by a mortgage) on some one new street; but to keep the income always in hand, yearly accruing, never forestalled, but always disposable for real practical use, in those many necessary improvements which every part of the city requires."

The committee, to whom the question was referred by the common council, brought up their report on Monday last, and from this it would seem that the course urged by the journal in question is to be pursued. The report states that the committee "thought it desirable that some improvement should be carried into effect in the next year, and they had selected two plans which they considered would be great improvements and beneficial to the inhabitants of the city of London—one for forming a street from the south end of Water-lane, now called Blackfriars-street; and the other in the Old Bailey, from the south side of the New-inn to the south side of Prinsen-

square; and they recommended that they should be empowered to give the necessary notices of an application to parliament for an act to carry the same into effect."

Now, with the greatest respect for the common council, we are compelled to dissent, in the strongest terms, from such a mode of commencing the discharge of the trust committed to them. If the improvement of London be attempted in this way, it must inevitably prove a failure; half the money will be wasted, and discredit, instead of glory, be the result.

They have now the opportunity of rendering London the grandest and most convenient city in the world,—of cleansing, opening, connecting, and adorning its thoroughfares, of improving the arts, and handing down to posterity proofs of the opulence, knowledge, and taste of the nineteenth century. This, however, is not to be done by bit-by-bit, chandler's-shop dealings,—opening a back street here, taking off a corner there; knocking down one house in the north, and two in the south, without reference to some general plan, and a view to the ultimate result of the whole.

We see no reason to urge, the immediate realization of the whole sum proposed to be expended by the city in twenty years, but we do most strenuously call on the Committee to proceed as if this sum were in their hands for immediate disposal; to view the subject in a comprehensive manner; to see that every thing that is done be a part of a whole; and, overlooking merely local demands and personal claims, work out steadily a well-considered and settled scheme of improvement.

To obtain this, they should call to their assistance the first talent in the country; careful surveys should be made, and a general plan laid down, to which all private projects should be made to conform. At present there is not even a correct map of the metropolis, although Sir Robert Peel admitted its necessity several years ago, and promised that it should be made forthwith by the proper department. If this were now called for by the Common Council, it would probably be proceeded with forthwith; its paramount importance will be admitted at once, by all who have given attention to the subject.

In an "Account of the proposed improvements of the western part of London," by Mr. J. White, published in 1815, a copy of a treasury minute, dated July 1793, is given; wherein the surveyor-general of Crown lands recommends, that "before agreeing to any proposal for the alteration or disposal of any part of Marylebone Park, a general plan should be formed for the improvement of the whole of it, lest such partial alteration should afterwards be found inconsistent with what should be deemed most for the benefit of the Crown." He further proposed that certain plans should be lithographed and sent to architects, and some "considerable reward" given to the person who should produce such a plan as may be adopted. The Lords agreed to the report, and directed the offer of a reward not exceeding 1,000*l.* for the plan. To what extent the offer was made known, and what was the result, does not appear.

Surely, however, this minute should be an admonition to the city authorities. In the discussion on the report that has led to our reports, and which, it must be mentioned, was ultimately agreed to by a large majority, it was insisted that the improvements referred to in it, could be effected without any considerable outlay; "and would be the most judicious precursors of the extensive changes which must rapidly take place." Why, who in the court

will venture to deny, till the whole question of city improvement has been competently investigated, that the two streets now proposed to be formed, may require to be pulled down within five or six years, in order to carry out some general plan, or worse still, through dislike to removing what has been recently put up, may prevent the consummation of a comprehensive and efficient scheme? Indeed, remembering the decision to which the court came on the same day, as regards railway termini in Farringdon-street, it seems nearly certain that this must actually be the case.

## OPENING MEETING OF INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS.

ON Monday evening last the members of the Institute assembled to commence a new session; Mr. Tite, vice-president, in the chair. Amongst numerous donations announced were some works on Norwegian Antiquities, from the University of Christiania (with a very nice letter), and the concluding part of Mr. Owen Jones's fine work on the Alhambra—a work unequalled for beauty and costliness.

The chairman said it was customary for the president of the first meeting, to allude to the circumstances connected with architecture that had occurred during the recess, and he much wished the duty had fallen into abler hands. He was glad to say they were commencing the season well, the funds were increasing, and their connections extending. The principal difficulty, as they were aware, was to obtain papers and induce discussions,—a difficulty, however, which was not confined to them, but was found in all the societies. The latter he considered of great importance:—"Iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the wit of man his friend." It was desirable for men to rid themselves of *mauvaise honte*, and afford others the benefit of their experience. He would ask all to contribute a little; if they would do this, every evening of meeting would be spent not merely pleasantly but usefully. Since he last met them, he had twice visited the capital of France, and he considered it his duty to say how much they were doing there, not only to increase the elegance of the city, but its comfort, particularly by the construction of broad open streets, and good drains. The magnificence of the modern architecture was very striking, and was not confined to churches, but extended to the dwelling houses. The French architects had an advantage in the custom which prevailed there, of several families living in the same building, on different stories; this gave them larger masses to deal with than architects in England had. He then alluded to some of the principal public buildings lately completed there, the church of St. Vincent de Paul, Notre Dame de Lorrette, and the Hotel de Ville. Of the former building, already described in *THE BUILDER*,\* he spoke at some length. On this 163,000*l.* had been spent. The stained glass there, was the best modern glass he had ever seen. The remembrance of these churches led him to express a desire felt by many of the elder members of the profession, that during the prevalence of the present fashion, as he would call it, for Gothic architecture, we should not overlook the effects that may be produced by classic architecture. The speaker then alluded to the melancholy death of Mr. Basevi, and sketched the principal events of his life, as already put forth in our pages.

Mr. Poynter, in continuation of the chairman's remarks on works in Paris, described the coloured decorations of the *St. Chapelle*, now completed, as the most perfect he had ever seen. In England, some deplorable effects had been produced by the use of heavy colours, but there, from the manner in which all was detailed and relieved, the appearance was admirable. All the mullions and shafts, of vermilion or green, were covered with fine lines of gold, beautifully embossed. Every leaf and piece of foliage had a sharp black line round it, by which the effect was greatly improved. The vaulting (a deep blue, covered with stars) was not so satisfactory; still they had authority for all. It was worth remembering, that, when first constructed, this and St. Stephen's Chapel, London, were decorated

\* See page 3 ante.